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THE WOMEN OF ANCIENT EGYPT.

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by

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THE WOMEN OF ANCIENT EGYPT.

Family Life and Social Customs.

In that long strip of fertile Nile valley lying like a green thread between the encroaching yellow wastes of sand, there has lived from earliest times a red-brown race of men made cosmopolitan by frequent mixture with the fair-skinned Libyans to the north and the dark hued Nubians from the south. This race, highly educated and practical to the last degree yet affectionate and beauty-loving, naturally appeals to our national spirit. Nor is our interest lessened but rather increased when we narrow the study to the women. Erman maintains that "The position of women is very much the same amongst all nations who have attained a certain degree of culture", but the history of the Babylonians and Greeks seems to disprove such a statement. The women of those countries were free before the age of highest culture but lost their independence with the advance in civilization. In Egypt, on the other hand, as far back as we can discover woman was the free and well-beloved helpmate of man. In truth it seems never to have occurred to the man of that ancient land that woman might not have as important a place in the economy of life as himself. He admired her for her superior beauty, loved her for her charms as wife and mother, and valued her for the products of her industry. For convenience we shall divide the women into two classes, though there were more, those who belonged to the nobility and those who did not.

Let us consider first the daughter of the nobility. Surrounded by all the luxury of a wealthy home, the little girl of this ancient

land seems to have come into the world as welcome as any daughter of our own age. We have but one record of the rejoicings on such an occasion, which, as it was written by the great Queen Hatshepsut to further her claims to the crown, may have been not a little exaggerated as to details but must upon the whole give the correct idea that the little daughter of the king was not unwelcome. This position is still further confirmed by the love with which the child was always surrounded. In the fourth dynasty, Khufu built a pyramid for his daughter[2] and the heretical king Ikhnaton[11] is continuously represented with his little daughters around him. If she were the eldest daughter she received especial attention being the heir to the estate.[4] This little girl of a far off age becomes more of a living reality when we learn that she too played with dolls. Her dolls were made of wood and could move their arms.[4] Besides dolls she had little bowls of pottery.[8] Erman in speaking of education does not mention that the girls were educated along with their brothers. Hatshepsut from her own account seems to have received at least the education which travel gives.[2] Not every girl even of a noble family had such an opportunity but she seems to have improved her time by reading the great book which nature opened for we see her wading in the swamps to gather lilies[12] or joining her parents when they went out in the canoe to hunt birds.[11]

Until her marriage this little lady of old Egypt stayed under her mother's supervision. Erman says,"We do not know what formalities were necessary for the conclusion of a legal marriage in Egypt . . . there were probably as in Greek and Roman times, formal marriage contracts. It may be also that it was customary, as in later times, to have the 'year of eating', the first year of probation, after which, by the payment of a certain sum of money, the marriage might be annulled". Most of the records seem to indicate that the rpincipal feature was a feast.[2] It usually happened the the girl married her brother,

though naturally this was not always the case. Being of noble birth she was always, except perhaps in the case of a queen, the legitimate wife and mistress of the household. Her husband if he were wealthy enough, might keep other women, if a king they might be of noble birth, and the slaves of the household belonged to him.[5] In spite of this the husband seems to have loved his wife dearly and treated her with every consideration. The most noted examples of this husbandly devotion is displayed by the two kings Amenhotep III and IV. The former built a pleasure-lake for his queen and the latter took greatest pleasure in having his wife appear with him on all occasions.[2] But the kings were not the only husbands who cared for their wives as is shown by the monuments erected to the them and the property left them.[2] That the wife also was most devoted to her husband Erman shows from a funeral stela on which the wife laments her husband thus:-"I am thy sister Meryt-Re[A]; thou great one, forsake me not. Thou art so beautiful, my good father. What does it mean that I am now far from thee? Now I go alone... Thou who didst love to talk to me. Thou art now silent and doest not speak."[5] Polygamy was the exception. We seldom find two wives ruling in a house at the same time. Royal double marriages were more frequent for political reasons. Pepi II married two sisters and Amenhotep III married a Hittite princess after his marriage with Tiy.[2&5] Sometimes the wife as a part of her wedding gift to her husband brought with her a harem as was the case with the Hittite princess just mentioned. Occasionally it happened that men of lower degree followed the kingly precedent and to advance their own interests married more than one wife. Marriages for money in those days seem to have been no more happy than in our present age. An example of such a marriage seems to appear in the family of Beni-Hasan. "Amenhotep[A], son of Nehr'e,..., owed the possession of the nome of the Gazelle to the fortunate mar-

riage of his father with the heiress of theprince of that house. In order to secure the same good fortune to his children, he married Chety, the heiress of the nome of the Jackal, and in fact, through this marriage, his son, Nacht, succeeded later to this province. But though Chety was treated with all the respect due to her high rank as his "beloved wife", and as "lady of the house", and though her three sons alone were called the "great legitimate sons of the prince", yet the love of Chnemhotep seems previously to have been bestowed upon a lady of his household, the "mistress of the treasury, T'atet". Contrary to former custom, Chnemhotep caused this lady and her two sons, Neher's and Chnemhotep, the "sons of the prince", to be represented in his tomb, immediately following his official family. She also accompanies him in his sporting expeditions, though she sits behind Chety, and does not wear as beautiful a necklet as the legitimate wife". Thus we see that although the legitimate wife was always highly respected and custom considered the best beloved yet reality may not always have been so pleasant. The father was usually very careful about choosing a husband for his daughter as is shown by the inscription of Ptahshepsos. "His majesty gave to him the king's eldest daughter, Hatkha as his wife, for his majesty desired that she should be with him more than (with) anyone". The daughter did not lose her interest in her father's family after her marriage. We find many instances of a daughter erecting a tombstone to the memory of her parents and looking after the funeral offerings.[2]

A lady of noble rank, though she never did any menial labor, had many other duties to perform. Above all she was devoted to her family. Erman says, "The mother had charge of the child during its infancy, she nursed it for three years and carried it on her back". She did not usually have a large family and was often aided in the care of it

by a nurse but she liked to have her children around her even on ceremonial occasions.[11] Fortunately for her, her husband also was fond of children so that we have many charming family groups. In a picture of a wine party under the New Empire, the host and hostess sit side by side. Upon the host's knee is his little child and many of the guests also have their children with them.[6] Her husband was fond of hunting birds with her,[12] eating with her,[8] playing draughts with her,[12] walking with her,[11] holding court with her,[11] sitting with her hand in hand or having her bring a cool drink to him as he sits under the cool shade of an arbor.[11] The wife was often the husband's councilor also if the titles of the ladies of the court tell anything. In the building inscription of Ahmose I it is written,"How it came to pass that his majesty sat in the audience-hall (even) the King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Nebpehtire, Son of Re, Ahmose (I), given life; while the hereditary princess, great in favor, great in amiability, king's daughter, king's sister, divine consort, great king's wife, Ahmose-Nefretiri, who liveth was with his majesty."[2] They were consulting about the pyramid and service of the dead queen-mother Tetisheri. The Tell-el-Amarna letters show that Queen Tiy was consulted about still more important affairs. But not all the time of the Egyptian lady was spent thus in the companionship of her husband and children. In the New Empire almost every woman belonged to the harem of a god and helped form the great choruses of singers and players, holding various degrees of rank as in an earthly harem.[6] She had her position also in the court as princess of the royal blood or lady or maid of honour to the queen. In such positions she often bore the fan, an especial mark of honour.[5] Her high social position demanded that she also play the role of hostess frequently which she does both with her husband, feasting the nobles of the court and their wives, and alone with her most intimate lady friends.[11] Indeed she seems to have entertained alone quite as

frequently as in connection with her husband. They seem to have had something on the order of our house parties when whole families visited each other.[11] Besides her household cares and social duties, she also had quite a few business responsibilities in connection with her property holding.

If she died before her husband he usually showed his devotion by building her a handsome tomb. In the fourth dynasty under Khufu is this dedicatory inscription,"By the Pharaoh's treasurer of the god, Zezemonekh, who made this for his wife Hubhotep. He buried her in this beautiful tomb."[2] If the husband died first he still surrounded her as far as was in his power with the evidence of his love by leaving her land and property in his will. Prince Nekure left a town to his wife Nekemnebti and Idu gives a field to his wife.[2] After the death of her husband she still played a leading part as the mother of her son. Not infrequently as regent she ruled a city or even the whole land. Kheti's mother is said to have ruled her city so well that the whole city loved her.[2] Occasionally she enjoyed power so much that she kept her position even after her son's majority.[4] She also had her own property as has been stated so that she was financially independent. Her property was usually administered by a man but she must have had supervisory duties.[5]

If the Egyptian woman was loved as daughter and wife she may truly be said to have been adored as a mother. It was the almost universal custom to maintain the service at the tomb of the mother as well as at the tomb of the father, especially when, as was generally the case, the two were buried in the same tomb. Dutiful sons and daughters were most careful of the future of their parents.[2] But indeed the mother was frequently especially honored alone. Away back in the fourth dynasty we read the inscription,"Revered by the great god,

king's confidante, Henutsen. It was her eldest son, the field-judge, who made (it) for her, to make mortuary offerings to her therein". Women seem to have payed more attention to their female ancestors than men as was quite natural. Miss Buttles mentions the case of Hatshepsut and several others. Many of the royal ladies received divine honors after death. Among them were 'Ah'-hotep and Aahmes-Nefertari. The latter was worshipped for six hundred years after her death. The worship of this queen was of longer duration than that of any other royal person in Egypt.[4]

The life of an untitled lady must be read from the pictures rather than from the written records though occasionally a word or two from them gives a hint as to the condition of such women. As children they often appear as maids in the home of a wealthy family, helping the mistress with her toilet[11] or delighting the guests at a feast with the grace of their movements[11] and the beauty of their persons.[5] These children as they grew older were often trained in singing, dancing, and the playing of musical instruments and became members of the harem of their lord. That they wielded much power in this position is shown by the harem conspiracy against Ramses III.[2] That they were also unhappy from jealousy is shown by the fact that a physician not only had to prescribe what would make a lady's hair beautiful but what would make her rivals fall out. Occasionally such a maid in after life became a lady of rank even a queen owing to her son succeeding to his father's position, or as in the case of Queen Tiy, herself so winning favor with her lord as to be elevated to the position of chief wife.[4] It was only a small percent, however, of the girls of ancient Egypt who found their way into the luxurious confines of a harem for it was indeed a wealthy man who could afford such an expance. If she were a slave though, and a large part of them were, she belonged body and soul to her master and in truth considered herself of no worth if she did not

attract his attention.[5] Of that large body of girls who had no such connection with the household of a nobleman we know but little. Ameni in the reign of Sesostris I of the Twelfth Dynasty has inscribed upon his tomb "There was no citizen's daughter whom I misused".[2] Erman says the workman on the necropolis had his wife or more frequently a friend who lived with him as wife. There is a collection called "the beautiful gladsome songs of thy sister, whom thy hart loves, who walks in the fields" that tells the familiar story of a loving maiden scorned by the man she loves who at last discovers her worth when she has ceased to care.[5] The wife of the working man had this advantage over her noble sister that her husband was too poor to afford more than one wife so she had his undivided love. She was free to do as she pleased so far as the law was concerned but usually she helped her husband in the support of the family. That she had the same devotion from father, husband, and children as the noble lady is shown by the numerous small tombstones erected to her memory.[8]

Character and Dress.

As the study of the Egyptian woman in her family and social relations show, her nature was very affectionate especially where it touched her husband and children. There is hardly a statue of a man and wife together in which the wife is not represented as having one arm around the shoulders or waist of her husband.[8] And when she is pictured with her children she is usually nursing them or fondling them in some way.[11] Towards her friends also she shows a loving attitude, tapping them under the chin, offering them flowers to smell, or in other ways showing her good will toward them.[11] The Egyptian woman did not confine her loving to people alone but included the animals as well. She was seldom without her pet monkey or lamb or other small animal which she usually had tied to her chair.[11] Like other women of all ages and times, the Egyptian woman was very religious . Service of the dead was a part of her religion which especially appealed to her nature. In the fifth dynasty under Userkaf, a man and his wife, the latter the daughter of Nekonekh, had three statues made, representing Nekonekh and themselves.[2] In the eighteenth dynasty under Amenhotep I, Aeres has inscribed a stela,"Command of the king's-mother to the hereditary prince, count, wearer of the royal seal, sole companion, overseer of the gold-house, chief steward of the king's-mother has commanded to have made for thee a tomb * * There shall be made for thee mortuary offerings, as the king's-wife does for the one whom she has loved."[2] The service of the dead was not the only religious duty which these ancient women performed by any means. In the first chapter the fact was mentioned that in the New Empire every woman belonged to the harem of the god and helped form the great choruses of singers and players that performed

at the numerous religious feasts and ceremonial occasions. There are many pictures of ladies carrying sistrums and in the tombs at Dashour both sistrums and flagellums have been discovered.[7] The queens were in a position to do even more than this and we find that they did especially if they were acting as Pharaohs. Queen Ahhotep, the mother of Thutmose I, repaired the tomb of her ancestor Queen Sebekemsaf, who was the wife of one of the thirteenth dynasty Intefs. The most noted example of queenly devotion to the gods is given in the case of Hatshepsut.[2] She restored the numerous temples which had been desolated by the Hyksos, erected her famous obelisks in the temple of Karnak, and, what is most wonderful of all, sent out the great expedition to Punt to bring trees and gold for her temple. This is her dedication,"The king himself, the King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Makere (Hatshepsut). Taking the measure of the electrum, laying the hands on the (-) of the heaps, first instance of doing the good things. Measuring the fresh myrrh unto Amon, lord of Thebes, lord of heaven, the first of the harvest - - - of the marvels of the country of Punt. The lord of Khmunu (Thoth) records them in writing; Sefkhet counts the numbers. Her majesty (fem.) herself is acting with her two hands."[2]

In healthy opposition to this intensely religious nature is the love which the Egyptian woman had for the out-of-door world. The picture of the woman and little girl in a boat with the husband and father, the former gathering water lilies while the latter hunted the swamp birds[3] with his boomerang has been mentioned before as has also the wooden ointment bowl[5] on which a girl is represented pulling lotus flowers from the water. One of her favourite pastimes was to sit in the field all day long beside traps baited with worms, waiting for the moment when at last she should hear the "wailing cry of the beautiful bird smelling of myrrh."

There is a darker side to this otherwise happy picture of the character of the Egyptian lady. She was too fond of the wine cup as Erman shows in his description of the picture of a ladies' wine party. He says,"Even the ladies do not refrain from excess (in drinking) for when at last they refuse[5] the ever-offered bowl, they have already, as our picture shows, presumed too much on their powers. One lady squats miserably on the ground, her robe slips from her shoulders, the old attendant is summoned hastily, but alas! she comes too late."

Having thus gained a picture of her mental self let us now proceed to examine her as she looked to the people who passed her on the street. According to the statues and reliefs the most admired type of beauty in the early times was a chubby little lady with round doll-like face,-fat cheeks and thick lips, and long hands and feet.[6] In later times the ideal changed until in the portrait of Nefertiri we see a slender lady of medium height with long slender neck crowned by a long, narrow head. The face is thin, the nose long and delicate, the lips thin and the chin well modelled.[11] The lady of this age might have been a model for Rossetti. But whatever the type whether early early or late, the lady's beauty was thought to be much enhanced by the painting and rouging of the face.[5] Two colors were chiefly used-green, with which under the Old Kingdom they put a line under the eyes, and black, with which they painted eyebrows and eyelids in order to make the eyes appear larger and more brilliant. It was customary to paint other parts of the body as well, and from a picture of a singer to Amon it is thought that the lady had her arm tatooed.[5] The oiling of the limbs and of the hair was thought to be almost as important as their clothes. A lady had on the top of her head during a feast a ball soaked in oil so that the oil would trickle down into her hair as she ate. Perfumes such as myrrh, broom, frankincense, buckhorn etc., were pounded togeth-

or and burnt or mixed with honey and chewed to make the breath sweet.[6] Even the deceased were not happy without seven sorts of salve and two sorts of [illegible].[5] Quoting from Hatshepsut's reliefs we read, "the best myrrh is upon all her limbs, her fragrance is divine dew, her odor is mingled with Punt, her skin is gilded with electrum, shining as do the stars in the midst of the festival-hall."[2]

Just as the ideal of beauty changed so also did the style of dress with the single exception of the footwear. Men, women and children, young and old went barefoot even when wearing the richest costumes.[5] Under the New Empire sandals seem to have been worn quite frequently but these were merely soles of leather, papyrus reed or palm bast, bound to the foot with two straps of the same material.[3] According to our ideas the style of dress of the Egyptian woman appears very monotonous from the fourth to the eighteenth dynasties every woman whether princess or peasant wore the same dress. In the Haskell Museum may be seen the statue of a lady and her husband as they looked in the year three thousand B. C., She is wearing one form of the prevailing style of gown, namely a tight princess reaching to the ankles and having a V neck and no sleeves. The other form of the dress was simply the narrow skirt held up by one or more bands over the shoulder or by a wide girdle.[5] These gowns might be colored red or buff[11] but for the most part they were white. "This proscription of color", according to Erman, "was doubtless due to the desire for cleanliness of the body; the same wish which led the Egyptians to shave both hair and beard". Beginning with the eighteenth dynasty there began to be a change. The richer women wore two articles of clothing- the original tight-fitting gown over which is a loose-sleeved kimono-like garment.[1] Both pieces were of such exceeding fine cloth that the lady's figure was easily discernable.[6] Often this outer cloak was worn over but one shoulder[5] and again it was

the only piece of clothing.[3] Those who had to do menial labor still clung to the ancient form of dress though they often tucked up their skirts to give their limbs freer play.[11] Dancing girls sometimes wore very short skirts and no waists except occasionally ribbons wound around the body.[11] The slaves who under the New Empire served the lords and ladies at feasts or aided in my lady's toilet wore as their only article of clothing an embroidered leather belt.[11a5] In the picture of the harem of Ramses III the ladies are represented as entirely nude. From this it may be readily deduced that the Egyptians were great admirers of the grace and beauty of the human form and further that they had not the same ideas of propriety in dress that holds at the present day.

However meager her dress the Egyptian woman made up on her coiffure. Under the Old Empire the women of all classes wore a wig of straight hair hanging down to the breast in two tresses or bobbed off at the neck like children's of the present day.[5a8] Under the wig in front the natural hair was visible covering the forehead almost to the eyes sometimes. With the eighteenth dynasty there was a change in the style of hairdressing as of everything else. The hair was allowed to hang down covering the whole of the upper part of the body or was combed back so as to hang down the back. In the latter form it might be left long, or cut short and standing out.[5] Later in the twentieth dynasty the style seems to have changed back to the older and stiffer form of wigs.[5] The queens wore various forms of crowns from the beautiful examples of the jeweler's art owned by Khoumit[7] to the less graceful vulture and uraeus crowns of later ages. The noble ladies when at a feast wore the oil-soaked sponge upon their heads. Rich and poor alike were fond of wearing flowers. Many have a ribbon or a circlet of metal when in gala costume.[11]

The Egyptian woman was fond of jewelry and as a result the gold

and silver smiths were adepts in their art. The beautiful bracelets pictured in the Fouilles a Dashour are marvels of skillfuland artistic workmanship. Beside the bracelets there are pins, rings, tiaras, and pectorals of metal. The poorer classes unable to afford metal ornaments contented themselves with glass and faience beads of beautiful coloring and designs and bracelets of shells. Beside their personal ornaments a lady had numerous other little belongings, such as alabaster toilet jars, ivory combs, and slate palettes for eye-paint, not to mention the boxes for her wigs. It is impossible to give an adequate idea of the beauty of design and the richness and beauty of finish and the brilliancy of coloring of this ancient jewelry and toilet furniture except by means of colored prints.

A description of the Egyptian woman would not be complete without a short sketch of the home in which she lived. Our knowledge of this field is limited but some general facts are known. The peasants probably lived in mud huts like the modern fellahin. The house of the citizen would perhaps consist merely of a small court with a few rooms at the back and a flight of steps leading up to the flat roof.[5] On the other hand, the great lord who lived in his park outside the town was not content with a building of this sort, he wanted a house for himself, another for his wife, another for the kitchen, a reception-hall for his distinguished guests, a provision house, dwellings for the servants,.. As is the case now in the East, a palace of this kind must really have constituted a town quarter.[6] Such a home as this just described was furnished most sumptuously with great carved arm-chairs so high that cushions had to be furnished for the feet and gorgous inlaid tables were imported from Punt.

Civil Rights and Political Power

It is not surprising when one has learned the high esteem with which woman was held in generla that she should have an undisputed right in the eyes of the law to the same respect as had man. As near as we can gather from the records she had the right to inherit and hold property, to be tried by court, and to hold office in the government. Ancient Egypt outrivaled England in the early date of granting women the right to hold property and hold public office. The latter right was seldom taken advantage of except in the case of the minority of the male heir.

First let us study what the records tell us of the right to inherit and hold property. In the reign of Khafre, Prince Nekure left to "His daughter, the king's-confidante, Hetephires,(in) the eastern district,(the town of) 'Khafre - - ;'(in) the eastern backland,(the town of) 'Khafre - -" and also to"His beloved wife, the king's-confidante, Nekaunebti,(in) the nome of the Cerastes Mountain,(the town of)'Beautiful is Khafre (in the pyramid town) 'Great is Khafre', the estate of his daughter". [2] In the sixth dynasty in the reign of Pepi II there is a conveyance of land by Idu, [2] "As for this field, which I have conveyed to my beloved wife, Dismek (it is her) true (possession. As for any persons) who shall take it from this Dismek, they shall be--- for by the great god, lord of heaven, and I will seize them (like) wild fowl. I am (now) an --- and excellent spirit. I know - - - - (I have done) this for this Dismek, because she was so greatly honored in my heart; she said nothing to oppose my heart . . .' Dismek, she saith:"I was one amiable - - , beloved of the entire city. As for any persons who shall take this land from me, I will enter into judgement with them, by the

great God".[2] In the eighteenth dynasty during the reign of Thutmose I, there is a stela erected by Yuf, according to which he seems to have administered the property in Edfu of Queen Ahhotep, the mother of Ahmose I".[2] In the twentieth dynasty under Ramses VI, the South is designated as "the domain of the King's-Wife, Nefretiri which rests in Neam".[2]

Our second point for investigation is the right of the Egyptian woman to a trial. One of the main bits of evidence pointing to the usual form of trial is given in the account of the proceedings instituted in the prosecution by Pepi I of his queen. The record is left by one of the king's favorite officials thus "when legal procedure was instituted in private in the harem against the queen, Imtes his majesty caused me to enter, in order to hear (the case) alone. No chief judge and vizier at all was there, but only I alone."[2] This statement naturally leads one to suppose that in such a trial there was usually a chief judge and vizier at least. Another notable instance of the trial of women was in connection with the conspiracy which one of the women of the harem of Ramses III, Queen Tiy, instituted against her lord in order to place her son on the throne. Dr. Breasted says, "The king ordered their prosecution but before they came to trial he died * * * The court commissioned to try the conspirators received its instructions directly from the king, and was given not only full discretion as to the verdict, but also final power to execute punishment, which was otherwise usually fixed by the Pharaoh after trial. At the same time Ramses cautioned the judges to be certain of guilt, by the usual procedure in every case, and to punish none but the guilty. The court thus constituted with such unusual powers, consisted of fourteen officials, viz., two overseers of the treasury, two standard-bearers of the army, seven royal butlers, a royal herald, and two scribes. * * * * * * The records of four different prosecutions are preserved . The judges are not all

present at these four prosecutions. Six of them carried on the first and condemned twenty-two persons, * * *; besides the six wives of the officers of the harem-gate.* * All were permitted to commit suicide without leaving the court." Still another piece of evidence for the trial of women is to be found in the records of the twentieth dynasty under Ramses the IX.[3] These records tell of the trial at one time of twenty-two persons, two of whom were women, for robbing the royal tombs and at another time a still longer list of whom eleven were women for the same offence. Men and women alike were sentenced to imprisonment.

With regard to the political power of women Prof.Petrie is quoted as saying[4] "It is very doubtful if a king could reign, except as the husband of the heiress of the kingdom, the right to which descended in the female line, like other property". Miss Buttles says that "In later times, when the 'Solar line' became hopelessly involved by the rapidly changing dynasties of foreign kings and conquerors, a convenient arrangement was made by which a king could take an 'official wife' from among the princesses belonging to the so-called 'Harem of Amon', and by this nominal connection make good his claims through the supposed rights of his wife." It is an undisputed fact that in the tenth dynasty the mother of Kheti II was regent as is shown by the record- "The son of his daughter made his name to live and glorified (him). (-----(His daughter ruled in Siut), the worthy stock of her father (reigned in the city) ----- beloved of Upuaut, ----- beloved of the king, his favorite. The ----- (She acted as) lord, until her son became strong-armed."[2]

The first woman to assume such powers for life was the great queen Hatshepsut. Dr, Breasted in speaking of the biography of Ineni says, "The position of Hatshepsut is described in such a way as to give the impression that she is really the ruling power and 'his son'(Thutmose III) merely a figurehead." In the Punt reliefs Thutmose III appears in

in a subordinate position[2] showing that in this expedition at least the queen has priority of position. The unusualness of the reign of a woman and perhaps also indirectly the limits to which the queen had to go to establish her right is shown in the reliefs she had made representing herself as predestined to the throne. First she the story of her miraculous birth. This fiction had been long used by the Pharaohs and in fitting it to a woman there was such a violent wrenching of traditional details as to cause startling inconsistencies.[3] This tale was followed by the account of her girlhood. Quoting Dr, Breasted "Having actually during her father's life-time, made a journey with him to the north, she now sleightly warps its purpose (of which we know nothing) and represents the journey as the occasion of an acknowledgement of her coming kingship by all the gods of Egypt as she proceeds to Heliopolis to be crowned by Atum. According to the date of her jubilee (year fifteen), she must have spent fifteen years as crown prince (being nominated thirty years before the jubilee).

* *

We now reach the alleged real coronation of the queen which is represented as taking place before the court, at the command of Thutmose I, who retires from the throne in Hatshepsut's favor. As she bore the title "great king's-wife" for some time after accession, it is clear that she did not immediately succeed her father in the kingship as here represented".

So we see that in ancient Egypt just as at the present day it was no easy thing for a woman to gain the position of chief ruler of the land. It would have been impossible for Hatshepsut to have gained this position without the help of a powerful party nor was she able to maintain her place without its aid. The leader of this party seems to have been a certain Senmut.[5] Erman says "There is always a powerful favorite

to be found under similar queenly governments." This implication that women cannot rule without the aid of such a favorite is without the realm of this paper to discuss however interesting the task might be. That Hatshepsut was exceedingly powerful whether through the aid of this man or not is shown by the magnificence of the Punt expedition, the zeal with which it was carried out, and the farsightedness of the statesmanship that opened up this great highway of commerce.

The rise of Tiy is one of the mysteries of the eighteenth dynasty. Her parents seem to have belonged to the untitled Egyptian middle class[2]. Her mother may have had the duties which a valet usually performs. This position, Miss Buttles thinks probably brought the young king into contact with her little daughter with whom he fell in love so deeply that he never afterwards sought to release himself from her power. He built for her a great pleasure lake and had her name recorded on scarabs of his great hunting expedition though it is impossible to suppose that she could have accompanied him.[2] That Tiy was personally responsible for some of the policy of her husband's reign is shown by one of the Tell-el-Amarna letters. Her influence did not end with the death of her lord but seems to have strengthened her son to prosecute his marvelous design of forcing all Egypt to worship one god.

The Daughter-in-law of Tiy claims our attention next. As near as we can detect after such a long stretch of years, Nefertiri, the wife of Amenhotep IV or Ikhnaton, was not as strong a character as her great predecessor but owing to the influence of that exceptional personality she also held a prominent place in the politics of the time and is always represented along with her husband on all occasions. She participates in the bestowing of gifts upon the favorites on more than one occasion. The influence of these queens probably accounts for the great prominence of the wives of the officials who seem to occupy as important a place

as their husbands in the political life, coming in for their share of the rich favors and making public speeches before the court in acknowledgement of the same.

But it was not the chief queens alone who had political ambitions and powerful influence as is shown in the great Harem conspiracy against Ramses III mentioned in the first of this chapter. Though the hatred of the old king probably accounts for the wide extent of the conspiracy to a large extent yet it is doubtful even then whether the thing could have been pushed through as far as it was if the inmates of the harem h had not had considerable political influence.

Economic Importance.

Herodotus, contrasting the manners and customs of Egypt with those of other countries, remarks that the women went to market and carried on retail trades, while the men sat in the house occupied at the loom.[9] The reliefs, our only other source of information, do not altogether bear out this statement. The women of the upper classes at least are usually painted a lighter color than the men[5] showing that they lived principally within doors. The rich ladies went out only to hunt birds or pick flowers and the women of the harems were not allowed much freedom. Erman in his "Life in Ancient Egypt" shows the manner in which these ladies lived and the contribution they made to society. "In a tomb at Tell-el-Amarna, belonging to the close of the eighteenth dynasty, a destinguished priest called 'Ey has caused his house to be represented. After passing through the servants' offices, the store-rooms, the great dining hall, the sleeping room, and the kitchen, at the further end of a piece of ground, the visitor came to two buildings turned back to back and separated by a small garden. These were the women's apartments. . . . A glance shows us how the inmates were supposed to occupy themselves; they are represented eating, dancing, playing music, or dressing each other's hair; the store-rooms behind were evidently full of harps, lutes, mirrors, and boxes for clothes". These women were brought out on occasions of banquets to display their ability before the assembled guests much as the Geisha girls of Japan. They had a number of interesting and beautiful dances. One consisted of a number of symbolik poses of the Pharaoh conquering his enemies. Another seemed to have for its principle feature the skilful throwing

and catching of a number of balls in difficult positions. In still another[5] dance bones and tambourines are integral parts of the dance. Many of these dances involved difficult gymnastic feats such as the acrobats of our circuses entertain us with at the present day. Usually the dances consist of simple hand movements, often combined with just as simple feet movements also. Not infrequently part of the dancers are simply standing still and clapping their hands to keep time for the performers. The clapping of the hands may, however, have been only an accompaniment to the singing. Of singing Erman says,"It is certainly not accidental that in the pictures of the Old Empire the women appear to sing always without, and the men with, instrumental accompaniment; the women's voices were considered pleasant to listen to alone, but the men's, on the other hand, were preferred with harps and flutes;nevertheless the men alone seem to have been regarded as artists, the women probably sang only as an accompaniment to the dances. It was the usual custom for the singers to mark the time by clapping the hands, men waved their arms quickly when singing, while etiquette forebade women to do more than move their hands. Even under the New Empire this custom of beating time was in use, more scope however was allowed in their manner of singing, and male and female voices were employed with instruments." It sounds quite modern to hear that there was a school at Memphis[5] for the traing of female singers. It was not until the New Empire that women musicians became popular.[5] They played both single and double flutes, harps, lutes and lyres.[12] Instrumental music, like singing and dancing, seems to have been an accomplishment of the ladies of the harem only. But it was not always as mere entertainers that slave girls of a noble figured. They may be seen helping my lady at her toilet or serving guests at a banquet as well.

It can be readily seen, however, that had the work of the country been done by the noble ladies and women fo the harem alone very little

could have been said of the importance of the Egyptian woman economically. As has been noted before, only a small part of the female population belonged to this class of non-producers. The records of the monuments show uncounted numbers of slave-women working side by side with the men. Perhaps it would help to show what they did do by telling what they did not do. The men did the heavy work like sailing vessels, working in the quarries, caring for large animals, fishing ,etc., and the skilled labor like the making of pottery, carving of statues, and cooking for the king. The one thing which the women seem to do more than anything else is to carry things. The reliefs picture long lines of them with baskets of fruits, cages of birds, or jars of wine.[11&5] Sometimes they used yokes to aid them in carrying jars. Country women may also be seen leading such small animals as calves and carrying fowl by the wings causing one to wonder if they did not help in the care as well as in the selling of them. Herodotus statement that the women did the trading is not born out by the pictures. The only actual trading we see them doing is buying some fish although we can suppose that some of the birds and animals are being taken to market. Nevertheless there are so few pictures of trading at all that his statement may be true. His further statement that the men did all the weaving is only partly true. Erman says," The preparation of the clothes was considered as a rule to be the woman's work." One of the Pharaoh's officers among other duties had to superintend a number of peasants, the men working as serfs of the field, the women weaving for the state.[5] What looks most strange to us is to see that the men seem to do most of the cooking especially in the king's household. That the women do occasionally help in such work however, is shown by some little statuettes, one of a girl crushing corn and the other of a woman kneading dough.[5] In the Field Museum is an old mill consisting of two heavy mill-stones between which

the corn was ground. It is not improbable that two women turned this then as is the custom today. The Egyptian peasant woman was called upon to do other things as hard as turn heavy mill-stones; we see pictures of her in the field pulling stalks of grain and again sifting the grain. One of the most unusual occupations that woman engaged in was tomb-robbing.[2] Though this was probably the most remunerative of their occupations there seems to have been only a few who engaged in it and these did so only because that was the business of their husbands and not one of their own choosing.

There are many more things that one could study about the Egyptian woman that would be both interesting and instructive but the limits of the paper will not permit further amplification. So we must leave this lady of old Egypt dimly seen like a moving picture without color.